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STATE PASS EUR/WE KATE SHARP AND MARK POWELL, AF/C  
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/30/2018

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SUBJECT: BELGIUM PUSHES FOR AN EU BRIDGING FORCE FOR THE  
CONGO

Classified By: Political Economic Counselor Richard Eason

11. (C) MFA Congo Desk told Poloff December 2 that FM De Gucht would attempt to gauge Allied interest in an EU bridging force for the Congo at today's NATO Ministerial. Belgium is looking to see if other partners are ready. Belgium wants to be part of a force but cannot take the lead. Should a force be raised, the MFA expects the Belgian Cabinet to quickly decide in favor of a deployment; the MFA plans to discuss a possible force in Parliament this week. The bridging force would provide security for a few months until the increased MONUC troops were deployed. Post will follow up later in the week.

12. (C) U.K. DCM contacted Poloff December 2 to coordinate on the U.S. approach to the Belgians regarding the Congo. UKDCM spoke with MFA contacts December 1, who expressed confidence that a motion to contribute troops would pass Parliament. The MFA told him that Belgium was less inclined to contribute to MONUC, confirming earlier statements provided to Poloff. When asked where other European countries stood, UKDCM said that many were concerned with mission creep should a European force be sent to Congo; MONUC is a large force with a solid mandate to take action. However, UNSYG Ban may have specifically requested a bridging force from the EU, which might encourage some member states to provide more troops. A bridging force could possibly takeover security at Goma airport to free up MONUC troops for other missions. UKDCM added that his government had been sitting on the fence due to troop commitments elsewhere, but like other Allies, said the decision process might be in flux.

FOX

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